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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000217

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

AF/S FOR B.WALCH
DRL FOR N. WILETT
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR J. HARMON AND L. DOBBINS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC PHUM ZI
SUBJECT: A TRUCE IN THE WAR OF WORDS IN ZIMBABWE

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SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) This week has been dominated by a church service and public memorial for Susan Tsvangirai, and a public internment. President Robert Mugabe had conciliatory words for Morgan Tsvangirai at the church service; Tsvangirai's eldest son and MDC secretary general and GOZ finance minister Tendai Biti reciprocated at the memorial and internment respectively. Separately, the MDC had praise for retired general Vitalis Zvinavashe who died this week. END SUMMARY.

In Memory of Susan Tsvangirai

¶2. (U) The Methodist memorial church service for Susan Tsvangirai on March 10 was attended by several hundred people including President Robert Mugabe, the two vice presidents, the two deputy prime ministers, government ministers from both parties, and diplomats. Mugabe was the only politician to speak. In a lengthy address, he said the car crash was the "hand of god" and that all, including Morgan Tsvangirai and his family, should accept it as such. He said it would take time for Morgan Tsvangirai to recover, and that "we are with" the prime minister during this day and the days to follow. He stated that all, including himself, were doing their best to create a conducive environment in Zimbabwe for the government of national unity to succeed, and that the days of violence must now end. He went on to eulogize Susan Tsvangirai, and urged the Tsvangirai children to honor their mother by working hard to succeed in life.

¶3. (U) Later in the day, a public memorial was held at Glamis Stadium and was attended by between 10 and 15 thousand people. (The MDC estimated the crowd at 30 thousand.) The

event resembled an MDC political rally. No ZANU-PF officials attended. Speakers included Biti, representatives of the MDC women's and youth leagues, and representatives of civil society organizations allied with the MDC, including Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), National Constitution Assembly (NCA), and women's and youth groups. The general theme was reconciliation. Discordant notes were booing at the mention of MDC-M leader Arthur Mutambara (who was in attendance), and a student leader's comments that, given Zimbabwe's history, the death of Susan Tsvangirai was suspicious and an investigation was necessary. Notably, Tsvangirai's eldest son referred to Mugabe's remarks, praised them for their conciliatory and fatherly tone, and said he had become aware of another side of Mugabe.

¶4. (U) The internment of Susan Tsvangirai took place in Buhera, the Tsvangirai family home, on March 11. (NOTE: The Tsvangirais were traveling to Buhera last week for a rally when the fatal accident occurred. END NOTE.) About 5,000 people attended, many traveling long distances. Again notably, Tendai Biti, who publicly and privately has been one of Mugabe's most outspoken critics, thanked Mugabe for his conciliatory words the day before and, like Tsvangirai's son, Qconciiliatory words the day before and, like Tsvangirai's son, said Mugabe had revealed another side: "I think many of us are transiting to understand him better and I think yesterday (Tuesday) we saw a part that we are not used to and that part is he is also human...He is also a human being like all of us, if you get that message he gave at the church service, he was speaking not as a politician but as a father."

¶5. (U) In addition to Ambassador McGee, ambassadors from the EC, Germany, Sweden, Namibia, Kenya, and Tanzania attended. High-level government officials from Malawi and Zambia were also present. Ambassador McGee arrived after proceedings had

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begun. As he walked past the sitting crowd, he was recognized by master of ceremonies Nelson Chamisa. Everyone turned toward the Ambassador, raised an open hand in the traditional MDC salute, and chanted "McGee" in appreciation for his presence.

MDC Praises Zvinavashe

¶6. (U) General Vitalis Zvinavashe died on March 10. A liberation fighter, he replaced Solomon Mujuru as commander of the army in 1992 and in 1994 became Zimbabwe's first commander of defense forces. On the eve of the 2002 presidential election, Zvinavashe, in a clear rebuke to Morgan Tsvangirai, said the service chiefs would only recognize a president who had participated in the liberation struggle.

¶7. (U) Zvinavashe ran for Parliament in March 2008 and lost to the MDC candidate. He told other ZANU-PF candidates to "accept the reality" that the MDC had won, and urged people to preserve peace. In the last year, he reportedly has been a behind-the-scenes critic of Mugabe.

¶8. (U) The MDC issued a statement praising Zvinavashe as a liberation hero and mourning his death. MDC representatives will reportedly attend his funeral.

COMMENT

¶9. (SBU) This has been a rare week of civil political discourse and gestures in Zimbabwe with Mugabe and the MDC showering each other with roses. The Herald, which traditionally has either criticized Tsvangirai or ignored him, prominently and positively reported on the week's events involving Susan Tsvangirai. (A noteworthy exception to a

week of mostly objective journalism was a front-page article in The Herald reproducing an on-line commentary by Jonathan Moyo. Moyo suggested a suspicious connection between the attack of Air Marshall Perence Shiri (noting that a USAID driver was arrested), and the death of Susan Tsvangirai (erroneously claiming the driver of the truck was a USAID employee). It remains to be seen whether ZANU-PF will match conciliatory words with actions. Short-term we will look to see, *inter alia*, whether remaining detainees are released, whether there is an agreement on permanent secretaries and governors, and whether Parliament begins to take action to establish an independent Media Commission to liberalize the media environment and to repeal repressive legislation.

¶10. (SBU) In the short-term, at least, the death of his wife has created enormous sympathy and support for Tsvangirai, and the MDC itself feels that it has momentum. A Tsvangirai aide told us Tsvangirai will take two weeks off before resuming his duties. (The Herald reported today that Jacob Zuma had offered Tsvangirai and his family a place to stay in South Africa.) It will be important for Deputy Prime Minister Khupe who will be acting prime minister in Tsvangirai's absence, Biti, and others to sustain this momentum until Tsvangirai returns.

MCGEE